

MOTIVATIONS BEHIND CHINA'S ARMS SALES TO SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

This study seeks to answer the following social science research question: *what drives China's conventional arms transfers to sub-Saharan African countries?* It hypothesizes that the arms sales are motivated less by economic considerations and more by strategic considerations. To test the hypothesis, this study utilizes a comparative case study analysis of Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola to look for economic and strategic considerations for arms transfers. By examining the prevalence of each consideration in the cases, the study can draw broader conclusions as to whether China is primarily motivated by economic or strategic reasons.

The study finds that both economic and strategic considerations are present in the cases. Issues with data prevent this paper from drawing definitive conclusions about China's arms transfers to sub-Saharan Africa. However, the preponderance of available data indicates that China is likely motivated more by strategic considerations than economic considerations.

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Introduction

In recent years, the People's Republic of China (hereafter referred to as "China" or the "PRC") has increased its economic engagement in Africa in large part to advance its 'Going Out' policy and Belt and Road Initiative. Simultaneously, it has expanded its military and political engagement on the continent and facilitated the first-ever China-Africa Peace and Security Forum. One aspect of China's engagement in Africa has been through arms transfers. The country has grown to become the third-largest supplier of weapons to African nations, behind Russia and the United States. This research will examine the motivations behind Chinese arms sales to sub-Saharan Africa. It will consider the following social science research question: *"What drives China's conventional arms transfers to sub-Saharan African countries?"* This paper hypothesizes that the arms sales are motivated less by economic considerations and more by strategic considerations.

This research is important for both strategic and scientific reasons. First, countering global power competition from China is a principle security interest of the United States, as outlined in the 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance. One arena in which China is competing with the United States and attempting to influence the current international order is on the African continent. Knowing the motivations behind Chinese arms transfers to the region will allow US policymakers to develop appropriate policies in response. Additionally, there are conflicting explanations in academia about China's intentions with its arms transfers to the region. Several scholars argue that economic considerations such as profit are the motive behind these arms sales. Others contend that Chinese political and military objectives drive this activity.

Therefore, this research can contribute to the existing scholarship on the subject by validating one theory over others.

North Africa is commonly considered the more strategically significant part of the African continent. However, sub-Saharan Africa is increasing in its importance to the United States, China, and other world powers. The two regions are often associated with different identities, given their vast cultural and language differences. Therefore, generalizations of one region may not apply to the other. As such, this study will focus its research on sub-Saharan Africa. It will utilize a comparative case study analysis to examine and compare the motivations behind Chinese arms dealing in Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola. These countries represent the three largest receivers of Chinese weapons in sub-Saharan Africa from 2016 through 2020.¹ It will predominantly use qualitative data, although there will be intermittent usage of quantitative data when addressing specific numbers of weapons sales, exports, and related numerical information. The research will acquire data from existing databases, primary and secondary documentation, archives, contemporary journalism, government and NGO publications, and official press releases.

This paper will use the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) definition of "arms transfers," which includes "all international sales and gifts of weapons, including manufacturing licenses."² The type of arms discussed in this paper only refers to "conventional" arms. This research will use the International Peace Bureau's definition of "conventional" arms, which are "weapons that are not weapons of mass destruction."³ They

¹ "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database." SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 18, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

² "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database - Methodology." SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 5, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/background>.

³ "Conventional Weapons: IPB - International Peace Bureau." IPB. International Peace Bureau. Accessed June 14, 2021. <https://www.ipb.org/conventional-weapons/>.

include, but are not limited to, “armored combat vehicles, combat helicopters, combat aircraft, warships, small arms and light weapons, landmines, cluster munitions, ammunition, and artillery.”⁴ This research will use the following definition of small arms and light weapons from the United Nations: “any man-portable lethal weapon that expels or launches, is designed to expel or launch, or may be readily converted to expel or launch a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive, excluding antique small arms and light weapons or their replicas.”⁵

The term “arms transfers” is used interchangeably with the terms “arms sales,” “arms dealing,” and “weapons transfers,” as well as their various forms.

Literature Review

For decades, countries including the United States, France, Germany, and Russia have engaged in international arms sales to nations and other non-state actors for various reasons. In the 1980s, China became an arms dealer on the global stage, where it successfully sold to developing countries that favored its low-cost weapons.⁶ Despite the prevalence of arms dealing among developing and developed countries alike, weapons transfers are often a contentious and debated topic given their link to violent conflicts. With the growth of the international arms trade in recent decades, researchers have conducted a significant body of scholarship on key motivations of countries for selling weapons.

Why Countries Sells Arms Internationally

⁴ “Conventional Weapons: IPB - International Peace Bureau.” IPB. International Peace Bureau. Accessed June 14, 2021. <https://www.ipb.org/conventional-weapons/>.

⁵ United Nations. In International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons: Draft Decision. New York: UN, 2005.

⁶ Byman, Daniel and Roger Cliff, China’s Arms Sales: Motivations and Implications. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1999. https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1119.html.

There are various reasons why nations engage in the international arms trade. Existing literature suggests that countries sell weapons abroad for two primary motivations: economic or strategic purposes. This literature review identifies and examines six specific reasons, classified as “considerations” in this study, that make up these primary motivations. It also gives examples of how various countries have applied these motivations. It then highlights the potential shortcomings of the existing scholarship.

Economic Considerations for Arms Transfers

Figure 1: Summary of Economic Considerations for Arms Transfers

	Economic Considerations for Arms Transfers
1	To create profit for supplying country
2	To encourage the sharing of non-military goods and services
3	To create employment opportunities for supplying country

The first general theory for why countries engage in international arms sales is that it is for economic considerations. This section details three economic considerations.

To Create Profit for Supplying Country

The first potential aspect of a country’s economic motivation for arms sales is the desire for profit. According to Rachel Stohl, arms trading, including small arms and light weapons, is a profitable venture.⁷ In 2017, the SIPRI concluded that the global arms trade was worth a minimum of \$95 billion.⁸ However, they considered that number conservative due to the relatively limited amount of data on many types of arms exports. According to Amnesty

⁷ Stohl, Rachel. “Understanding the Conventional Arms Trade.” AIP Publishing. AIP Publishing LLC AIP Publishing, November 15, 2017. <https://aip.scitation.org/doi/abs/10.1063/1.5009220>.

⁸ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. “Financial Value of the Global Arms Trade.” SIPRI. Accessed June 22, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/financial-value-global-arms-trade>.

International, the world's top 100 largest arms companies generated 398.2 billion in profit in 2017.⁹

Research by Andrew Pierre likewise found that countries may sell weapons because the exports earn foreign exchange and contribute to their balance of payments.¹⁰ For instance, in a comprehensive study of US weapons sales, Michael Klare found that arms sales helped reduce its balance-of-payments deficit.¹¹ They may also contribute to profit by enabling the supplying country to create economies of scale.¹²

To Encourage the Sharing of Non-Military Goods and Services

Another consideration that may influence a country's economic motivation for selling arms is that it encourages both the supplying and receiving countries to share non-military goods and services.¹³ According to Christian Catrina, "cooperative government-to-government relations established by arms transfers may lead the recipient to place an additional part of its non-military orders with the same supplier."¹⁴

A key aspect of using arms sales to encourage the sharing of non-military goods and services is for the supplying country to secure resources.¹⁵ According to Catrina, certain arms sales are "barter agreements of highly specified offset arrangements" that involve selling

⁹ Amnesty International. "Killer Facts 2019: The Scale of the Global Arms Trade." Killer facts: The scale of the global arms trade | Amnesty International. Amnesty International, August 23, 2019. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/08/killer-facts-2019-the-scale-of-the-global-arms-trade/>.

¹⁰ Pierre, Andrew J. The Global Politics of Arms Sales. Course Book ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. muse.jhu.edu/book/33580

¹¹ Klare, Michael T. "Political Economy of U.S. Arms Sales." Social Scientist 4, no. 11 (1976): 3-19. Accessed June 22, 2021. doi:10.2307/3516195.

¹² Pierre, Andrew J. The Global Politics of Arms Sales. Course Book ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. muse.jhu.edu/book/33580

¹³ Marcovitz, Dan. The Arms Trade. Philadelphia, PA: National Highlights Inc., 2016. Accessed June 13, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴ Catrina, Christian. Arms Transfers and Dependence. Geneva: UNIDIR, 1988.

¹⁵ Ibid.

weapons for a particular supply of sources.¹⁶ This desire to secure resources particularly applies to raw materials that the supplying country cannot produce domestically.¹⁷

To Create Employment Opportunities for Supplying Country

The third potential aspect of a country's economic motivations for selling arms is that it could lead to employment opportunities for the supplying country.¹⁸ Various industries directly benefit from the global arms trade. For instance, Klare's research found that the US sold weapons in part to "ensure full production (and thus full employment) in the aerospace industry."¹⁹ Other industries indirectly benefit. For instance, Pierre highlights the "multiplier impact of jobs in one industry upon those in another."²⁰

Strategic Considerations for Arms Transfers

Figure 2: Summary of Strategic Considerations for Arms Transfers

	Strategic Considerations for Arms Transfers
1	To create influence with recipient country
2	To assist allies and partners
3	To establish security facilities in receiving countries

The second predominant theory for why countries export weapons is that they do it for strategic reasons. Keren Yarhi-Milo, Alexander Lanoszka, and Zack Cooper conducted research that examined the reasons for great powers engaging in arms transfers and found "weak

¹⁶ Catrina, Christian. Arms Transfers and Dependence. Geneva: UNIDIR, 1988.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Pierre, Andrew J. The Global Politics of Arms Sales. Course Book ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. muse.jhu.edu/book/33580

¹⁹ Klare, Michael T. "Political Economy of U.S. Arms Sales." Social Scientist 4, no. 11 (1976): 3-19. Accessed June 22, 2021. doi:10.2307/3516195.

²⁰ Pierre, Andrew J. The Global Politics of Arms Sales. Course Book ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. muse.jhu.edu/book/33580

evidence” that commercial interests drove the sales.²¹ Instead, they determined that countries primarily sell arms for “strategic” reasons rather than economic considerations.²² This section details three strategic considerations.

To Create Influence with Recipient Nation

Countries may sell weapons because they can create influence with the recipient nation.²³ Among other reasons, this occurs because countries purchasing weapons often become dependent on the exporting country to supply arms and provide knowledge of their operations. For instance, receiving countries may require additional supplies. Thus, it is advantageous to maintain a relationship with the selling country.²⁴ Klare found that “leverage accrues” due to many major weapons systems requiring “spare parts, training aids, and maintenance” only attainable from the original supplier.²⁵ This leverage creates a long-term dependent relationship between the supplying and receiving countries.²⁶

It also enables the supplying country to gain leverage over the recipient countries' foreign policy decisions.²⁷ For instance, the US utilized arms sales to “try to encourage states to vote with the United States at the UN, to support or adopt pro-Western and pro-US foreign policies, to convince Egypt and Israel to accept peace accords.”²⁸ Arms sales create influence by allowing

²¹ Yarhi-Milo, Keren, Alexander Lanoszka, and Zack Cooper. “To Arm or to Ally? The Patron's Dilemma and the Strategic Logic of Arms Transfers and Alliances.” *International Security* 41, no. 2 (2016): 90–139. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00250.

²² Ibid.

²³ Pierre, Andrew J. *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*. Course Book ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. muse.jhu.edu/book/33580

²⁴ Marcovitz, Dan. *The Arms Trade*. Philadelphia, PA: National Highlights Inc., 2016. Accessed June 13, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁵ Klare, Michael T. “Political Economy of U.S. Arms Sales.” *Social Scientist* 4, no. 11 (1976): 3-19. Accessed June 22, 2021. doi:10.2307/3516195.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Pierre, Andrew J. *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*. Course Book ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. muse.jhu.edu/book/33580

²⁸ Thrall, Trevor, and Caroline Dorminey. “Risky Business: The Role of Arms Sales in U.S. Foreign Policy.” *cato.org*. CATO Institute, March 13, 2018. <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/risky-business-role-arms-sales-us-foreign-policy#the-case-for-arms-sales>.

the supplying country to determine conditionality for the sale of the weapons.²⁹ However, this theory does not always prove successful in practice. For instance, William D. Hartung and Seth Binder examined the effectiveness of US security aid to Egypt. They found that “unconditional US military aid has not only failed to influence Egypt’s domestic policy, it has also failed to influence Egypt’s foreign policy to better align with US interests.”³⁰

Arms sales also help the supplying country increase influence by allowing it to gain access to political and military elites.³¹ As Klare notes, this is particularly applicable in third-world countries, where foreign military leaders often play key roles in national politics.³² Given the influential nature of arms sales, the relationships between the supplying country and the elites can be long-lasting, resulting in “significant political advantages” and future sales.³³

Creating influence allows the supplying country to compete with other nations. For instance, in Africa, Raska and Bitzinger argue that China attempts to compete with Russian markets while countering Western influence in the region.³⁴

To Assist Allies and Partners

Countries may use weapons sales and other military assistance to help political and ideological partners protect themselves.³⁵ As Klare notes, governments can use arms transfers to

²⁹ Thrall, Trevor, and Caroline Dorminey. “Risky Business: The Role of Arms Sales in U.S. Foreign Policy.” *cato.org*. CATO Institute, March 13, 2018. <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/risky-business-role-arms-sales-us-foreign-policy#the-case-for-arms-sales>.

³⁰ Hartung, William D, and Seth Binder. “Report – U.S. Security Assistance to Egypt: Examining the Return on Investment.” POMED. Project on Middle East Democracy. Accessed June 16, 2021. <https://pomed.org/report-u-s-security-assistance-to-egypt-examining-the-return-on-investment/>.

³¹ Pierre, Andrew J. *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*. Course Book ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. muse.jhu.edu/book/33580

³² Klare, Michael T. “Political Economy of U.S. Arms Sales.” *Social Scientist* 4, no. 11 (1976): 3-19. Accessed June 22, 2021. doi:10.2307/3516195.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Raska, Michael, and Richard A Bitzinger. “China as an Arms Exporter: The Strategic Contours of China’s Arms Transfers.” *Law and the Arms Trade*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781509922321.ch-011>.

³⁵ Gates, Robert M. “Helping Others Defend Themselves: The Future of U.S. Security Assistance.” *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 3 (2010): 2-6. Accessed June 16, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25680910>.

aid regimes favored by the supplying country.³⁶ According to Stephanie Neuman and Robert Harkavy, selling weapons is “economically less burdensome and politically less sensitive than stationing troops abroad.”³⁷ Former US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates posited that countries might not wish to enter into long-term engagements like that seen in the War on Terror.³⁸ Military assistance, therefore, can allow the supplying country to help its partners without having to take a direct role in the conflict.³⁹

One of the earliest examples of this, and one that Gates notes, was the American Lend-Lease Act in 1941. Signed by Roosevelt, the policy enabled the United States to supply various allied countries with weapons and other supplies to fight the Axis powers. It allowed the US to provide security to its allies and partners without committing troops. Taiwan, likewise, has regularly utilized this “arms-for-troops substitution” to assist its allies without stationing troops overseas.⁴⁰

A central component of assisting allies through arms sales is that the weapons may deter adversaries.⁴¹ For instance, the United States repeatedly sold weapons to the governments of Iraq and Afghanistan throughout the War on Terror to combat Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and other terrorist groups.⁴²

To Establish Security Facilities in Recipient Country

³⁶ Klare, Michael T. "Political Economy of U.S. Arms Sales." *Social Scientist* 4, no. 11 (1976): 3-19. Accessed June 22, 2021. doi:10.2307/3516195.

³⁷ Neuman, Stephanie G., and Robert E Harkavy. *Arms Transfers In the Modern World*. New York: Praeger, 1979.

³⁸ Gates, Robert M. "Helping Others Defend Themselves: The Future of U.S. Security Assistance." *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 3 (2010): 2-6. Accessed June 16, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25680910>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Thrall, Trevor, and Caroline Dorminey. "Risky Business: The Role of Arms Sales in U.S. Foreign Policy." *cato.org*. CATO Institute, March 13, 2018. <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/risky-business-role-arms-sales-us-foreign-policy#the-case-for-arms-sales>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

Arms transfers may allow the supplying country to establish military bases and intelligence facilities in the recipient country.⁴³ According to Neuman and Harkavy, arms sales are a “major instrument in the global competition for acquiring and maintaining strategic military access.”⁴⁴ Governments can use this access for training, staging of arms and personnel, naval repair, shore leave, and other overt applications.⁴⁵ Likewise, countries can use this access for reconnaissance and intelligence activities.⁴⁶ The United States, for instance, has utilized arms sales to gain access to military bases in countries throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.⁴⁷

Limitations of Existing Research

One shortcoming of the existing scholarship is that data on arms sales are potentially unreliable. The SIPRI, for instance, notes that “published trade figures [on country’s arms sales] are inadequate, and . . . are rarely comprehensive.”⁴⁸ Thus, figures utilized in many of these books could be underrepresented. Furthermore, SIPRI data, which much of the examined literature cites, only includes what it considers to be “major” weapons, such as aircraft, air defense systems, artillery, missiles, and ships.⁴⁹ It does not cover “military equipment such as small arms and light weapons other than portable guided missiles such as man-portable air

⁴³ Pierre, Andrew J. *The Global Politics of Arms Sales*. Course Book ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. muse.jhu.edu/book/33580

⁴⁴ Neuman, Stephanie G., and Robert E Harkavy. *Arms Transfers In the Modern World*. New York: Praeger, 1979.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Thrall, Trevor, and Caroline Dorminey. “Risky Business: The Role of Arms Sales in U.S. Foreign Policy.” *cato.org*. CATO Institute, March 13, 2018. <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/risky-business-role-arms-sales-us-foreign-policy#the-case-for-arms-sales>.

⁴⁸ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. *The Arms Trade with the Third World*. Harmondsworth Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975.

⁴⁹ “Sources and Methods.” SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 7, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/sources-and-methods>.

defense systems (MANPADS) and guided anti-tank missiles.”⁵⁰ Thus, countries that export large shares of small arms and light weapons (like China) may have their information inadequately represented in these readings.⁵¹

Another potential limitation of the existing scholarship is that the sources are predominantly of Western origin. Without native knowledge of the Chinese language, this paper was only able to examine literature written in English. Similarly, a large portion of the scholarship from the literature review uses the United States as a case study. While many themes may apply universally, some of the analyses might only pertain to the US and not other countries like China.

Hypothesis

This research will use a comparative case study analysis to determine China’s primary motivation for selling weapons to sub-Saharan African countries. It will test the following hypothesis:

H: China’s arms sales to sub-Saharan African countries are motivated less by economic considerations and more by strategic considerations.

If China is primarily motivated to sell weapons to sub-Saharan African countries for strategic purposes, the cases should show more significant evidence of strategic considerations rather than economic considerations.

⁵⁰ “Sources and Methods.” SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 7, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/sources-and-methods>.

⁵¹ Thrall, Lloyd. "Chinese Presence and Behavior in Africa." In *China’s Expanding African Relations: Implications for U.S. National Security*, 21-74. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2015. Accessed June 7, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt15zc655.10>.

Methodology

This study will utilize a comparative case study analysis to examine and compare the motivations behind Chinese arms dealing in Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola. This paper selected these countries because they represent the three largest receivers of Chinese weapons in sub-Saharan Africa over the last five years (2016 to 2020).⁵² Additionally, the countries have long histories of engaging with China on security and economic issues. As such, there is a large volume of data available to conduct a comparative case study analysis.

These case studies will evaluate the weapons imports from China into Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola to look for the presence of economic and strategic considerations for arms transfers. These considerations, introduced in the literature review, are re-shown in Figure 3. It is important to note that a country can be motivated to sell arms for both economic and strategic reasons. By examining the prevalence of each consideration in the cases, this study will draw broader conclusions as to whether China is *primarily* motivated by economic or strategic reasons.

Figure 3: Summary of Economic Considerations for Arms Transfers

	Economic Considerations for Arms Transfers
1	To create profit for supplying country
2	To encourage the sharing of non-military goods and services
3	To create employment opportunities for supplying country
	Strategic Considerations for Arms Transfers
1	To create influence with recipient country
2	To assist allies and partners
3	To establish security facilities in receiving countries

⁵² “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.” SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 18, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

This research will exploit primary and secondary documentation, archives, contemporary journalism, government and NGO publications, and official press releases to look for economic and strategic considerations in the cases. Suppose this assessment finds a correlation between China's arms sales and the two countries signing an economic or strategic agreement. In that case, this will indicate that there are economic or strategic considerations present.

This paper will use quantitative data from SIPRI when addressing specific numbers of weapons sales, exports, and other numerical information. SIPRI measures data through trend-indicator value (TIV), a unit representing the “transfer of military resources rather than the financial value of the transfer.”⁵³ They do not represent actual sale prices of the weapons transfers, but rather “raw data for calculating trends in international arms transfers over periods of time, global percentages for suppliers and recipients, and percentages for the volume of transfers to or from particular states.”⁵⁴

The TIV data only includes what the SIPRI considers to be “major weapons,” such as aircraft, missiles, sensors, ships, and artillery. It does not include small arms and light weapons. SIPRI acquired this data from a variety of open sources, including but not limited to: newspapers, television broadcasts, and government publications.⁵⁵ For additional information, refer to the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database - “Sources and methods” section.⁵⁶

⁵³ “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database - Methodology.” SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 5, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/background>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database - Methodology.” SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 5, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/background>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Data

This data section will begin by giving a brief overview of broader Chinese arms transfers to Africa. It will then provide an overview of the arms sales from China to Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola. Finally, it will examine each of the economic and strategic considerations in the context of these three cases.

Overview of China's Arms Transfers to Africa

Due to its growing political influence and more recent rise as a major arms exporter, scholars have paid increasing attention to the PRC's arms sales, of which 16 percent went to the continent of Africa.⁵⁷ From 2016-2020, China ranked as the world's fifth-largest arms exporter, accounting for 5.2 percent of the global share of arms sales.⁵⁸ According to the SIPRI, China's arms exports declined by 7.8 percent from 2016 to 2020.⁵⁹ However, this recent decline in sales accompanied a 16 percent decrease in total global arms sales in part due to the Covid-19 pandemic.⁶⁰ Moreover, this followed a 77 percent increase in China's weapons exports between 2006–2010 and 2011–2015.⁶¹

Overview of China's Arms Transfers to Sudan

From 2016-2020, China was the largest seller of weapons to Sudan, accounting for 41.7 percent of the total market share.⁶² It exported 96 million of the 230 million TIVs of arms to the

⁵⁷ Wezeman, Pieter D, Alexandra Kuimova, and Siemon T Wezeman. "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020." Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2021. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/fs_2103_at_2020_v2.pdf.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "How Dominant Is China in the Global Arms Trade?" ChinaPower Project, May 27, 2021. <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-global-arms-trade/>.

⁶¹ Wezeman, Pieter D, Alexandra Kuimova, and Siemon T Wezeman. "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020." Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2021. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/fs_2103_at_2020_v2.pdf.

⁶² "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database." SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 18, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

country.⁶³ The next largest suppliers were Russia (75 million TIVs) and Belarus (59 million TIVs).⁶⁴ Figure 4 shows the trade register of the Chinese sales over these five years.

*Figure 4: Trade Register of China-Sudan Arms Sales (2016-2020)*⁶⁵

Supplier/ recipient (R)	ordered	No. designation	Weapon description	Year(s) Weapon of order	Year delivery	of delivered	No. Comments
China							
R: Sudan	(5)	CH-4	Armed UAV	(2015)	2016-2017	(5)	
	(2)	FB-6	Mobile SAM system	(2015)	2016	(2)	
	(100)	FN-6	Portable SAM	(2015)	2016	(100)	
	6	FTC-2000	Trainer/combat ac	(2015)	2017-2018	(6)	
	(40)	Python-3	SRAAM	(2015)	2017-2018	(40)	PL-8 version; for FTC-2000 trainer/combat aircraft

Overview of China's Arms Transfers to Nigeria

From 2016-2020, China was the second-largest seller of weapons to Nigeria, behind Russia.⁶⁶ It exported 93 million of the 283 million TIVs of arms to the country, accounting for 32.8 percent of the total market share.⁶⁷ Figure 5 shows the trade register of the Chinese sales over these five years.

*Figure 5: Trade Register of China-Nigeria Arms Sales (2016-2020)*⁶⁸

Supplier/ recipient (R)	ordered	No. designation	Weapon description	Year(s) Weapon of order	Year delivery	of delivered	No. Comments
China							
R: Nigeria	2	P18N	OPV	2012	2014-2016	2	NGN6.8 m (\$42 m deal)
	(3)	SH-2 122mm	Self-propelled gun	(2019)	2020	(3)	
	(2)	SH-5 105mm	Self-propelled gun	(2019)	2020	(2)	
	(6)	VT-4	Tank	(2019)	2020	(6)	
	(6)	ZTL-09	AFSV	(2019)	2020	(6)	
	2	CH-3	Armed UAV	2020			
	(4)	CH-4	Armed UAV	(2020)	2020	(2)	
	2	Wing Loong-2	Armed UAV	2020	2020	2	

Overview of China's Arms Transfers to Angola

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

From 2016-2020, China was the second-largest seller of weapons to Angola, behind Russia.⁶⁹ China exported 72 million of the 745 million TIVs of arms to the country, accounting for 9.7 percent of the total market share.⁷⁰ Figure 6 shows the trade register of the Chinese sales over these five years.

*Figure 6: Trade Register of China-Angola Arms Sales (2016-2020)*⁷¹

Supplier/ recipient (R)	ordered	No. designation	Weapon description	Year(s) Weapon of order	Year delivery	of delivered	No. Comments
China							
R: Angola	(10)	Assaulter	AFSV	(2015)	2016	(10)	
	(5)	WZ-551	APC	(2015)	2016	(5)	
	(12)	K-8	Trainer/combat ac	(2018)	2020	(12)	K-8W version
	2	MA60	Transport aircraft	2018	2019	2	

Economic Considerations in the Cases

To create profit for supplying country

In the nascent stages of its role as a major arms exporter, China's profit received from international arms sales helped modernize the People's Liberation Army (PLA).⁷² The PRC viewed this modernization as a critical aspect of China's role as a world power in the years to come.⁷³ However, in 1998, the 15th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party ordered the PLA to dissolve its military business complex and divest its equity in commercial enterprises, an important source of its revenue.⁷⁴ According to Earl Conteh-Morgan and Patti Weeks, this

⁶⁹ "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database." SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 18, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Bitzinger, Richard. Chinese Arms Production and Sales to the Third World. Santa Monica, CA (P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica 90407-2138): RAND, 1991.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31822007678279>

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Crane, Keith, Roger Cliff, Evan Medieros, James Mulvenon, and William Overholt. Modernizing China's Military: Opportunities and Constraints. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005.

divestment meant that the PLA could no longer receive profits from civilian ventures and now had to rely on arms sales.⁷⁵ Therefore, markets in Africa are one way the PLA can “regain its lost domestic commercial profits via external commercial arms relationships.”⁷⁶

Updated and accessible information on China’s profit from its current arms sales to Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola is limited. This inaccessibility is due to China’s “lack of transparency” regarding its arms sales.⁷⁷ However, William Hartung found that “the revenues that China derives from sales to Sudan pale in comparison to the value of China’s exports of civilian goods and services.”⁷⁸

It is worth noting that a prominent feature of current Chinese weapons exports to Africa is their affordability. China often offers large loans and low-cost financing options to purchasing countries.⁷⁹ Specifically, Conteh-Morgan and Weeks note that the PRC makes arms “affordable to cash-poor countries through loans with very low interest rates.”⁸⁰

To encourage the sharing of non-military goods and services

Acquiring resources appears to be a frequent consideration of China’s engagement with sub-Saharan Africa. Similar to how the PRC makes its weapons affordable for developing countries through low-interest loans, the PRC also offers barter agreements and offset

⁷⁵ Conteh-Morgan, Earl and Weeks, Patti, "Is China Playing a Contradictory Role in Africa? Security Implications of its Arms Sales and Peacekeeping" (2016). School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies Faculty Publications, 2016. http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/sigs_facpub/19

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Tian, Nan, and Fei Su. “Estimating the Arms Sales of Chinese Companies.” SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, January 2020. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/estimating-arms-sales-chinese-companies>.

⁷⁸ Hartung, William. “Deadly Traffic: China’s Arms Race with the Sudan.” Publication – Center for Security Studies | ETH Zurich. Arms and Security Initiative, August 2008. <https://ethz.ch/content/specialinterest/gess/cis/center-for-security-studies/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/92130>.

⁷⁹ Conteh-Morgan, Earl and Weeks, Patti, "Is China Playing a Contradictory Role in Africa? Security Implications of its Arms Sales and Peacekeeping" (2016). School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies Faculty Publications, 2016.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

arrangements to countries with abundant natural resources.⁸¹ These deals involve the exchange of weapons for rights to natural resources, such as oil access.⁸²

Resources play a large part in China's relations with Sudan, specifically. In need of increased oil reserves to accommodate its rapidly growing economy in the 1990s, China turned to foreign exporters.⁸³ The China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) saw Sudan's emerging oil industry as an opportunity for investment.⁸⁴ The resulting oil cooperation between the two countries advanced their economic and political relations. Therefore, much of the weapons sales to Sudan were to gain access to the country's resources, particularly Sudanese oil supplies.⁸⁵ According to the Jamestown Foundation, its arms sales to Sudan "helps consolidate and protect Chinese investment in Sudan's oil reserves."⁸⁶

China's "massive domestic demand for oil" also appears to be a consideration for its sales to Nigeria.⁸⁷ Nigeria is the largest oil-producing country in Africa, and the commodity is a significant aspect of Sino-Nigerian relations. For instance, in 2005, Nigeria's government purchased \$251 million worth of military aircraft from China following "a series of significant oil deals."⁸⁸ Angola is the second-largest oil-producing country in Africa, and, like in Sudan and Nigeria, the commodity is a substantial aspect of Angola's relations with China.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch. "China's Involvement in Sudan: Arms and Oil." Sudan, Oil, and Human Rights: China's Involvement in Sudan: Arms and Oil, November 2003. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/sudan1103/26.htm>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Holtom, Paul, Mark Bromley, and Mathieu Duchâtel. "China's Exports of Small Arms and Light Weapons." SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, October 2013.

<https://www.sipri.org/publications/2013/sipri-policy-papers/chinas-exports-small-arms-and-light-weapons>.

⁸⁶ Taylor, Ian. "Beijing's Arms and Oil Interests in Africa." Jamestown. Jamestown Foundation, September 20, 2016. <https://jamestown.org/program/beijings-arms-and-oil-interests-in-africa/>.

⁸⁷ Singer, Jeffrey Lin and P.W. "It Looks Like An Armed Chinese-Made Drone Crashed In Nigeria." Business Insider. Business Insider, January 29, 2015. <https://www.businessinsider.com/it-looks-like-an-armed-chinese-made-drone-crashed-in-nigeria-2015-1>.

⁸⁸ Defense Industry Daily staff. "Nigeria Spends \$251M for Chinese F-7 Fighters After Oil Deals." Defense Industry Daily, September 30, 2005. <https://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/nigeria-spends-251m-for-chinese-f7-fighters-after-oil-deals->

To create employment opportunities for supplying country

Several of the major Chinese arms-producing companies, such as the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) and China North Industries Group Corporation Limited (also known as NORINCO), are state-owned enterprises (SEOs). Much of their information on sales, specifically of weapons, is not available to the public.⁸⁹ It is difficult to assess not only the current employment levels of these firms, but how many jobs have been created directly or indirectly as a result of weapons sales to Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola.

Strategic Considerations in the Cases

To create influence with recipient country

According to Raska and Bitzinger, China is “gradually positioning its arms exports as an instrument of its foreign policy to project presence, power, and influence in areas vital to its interests.”⁹⁰ Elsewhere, Chinese arms sales have helped the country strengthen its relationship with several Middle Eastern countries, such as Iran and Syria.⁹¹ They have also helped the country to counter the influence of other nations. For instance, Chinese arms sales to Pakistan are in part due to the PRC’s desire to prevent Indian regional hegemony in South Asia.⁹² In Africa, Raska and Bitzinger note that China “aims to provide an alternative option to markets

01269/#:~:text=Reuters%20reports%20that%20Nigeria's%20government,series%20of%20significant%20oil%20deals.

⁸⁹ Tian, Nan, and Fei Su. “Estimating the Arms Sales of Chinese Companies.” SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, January 2020. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/estimating-arms-sales-chinese-companies>.

⁹⁰ Raska, Michael, and Richard A Bitzinger. “China as an Arms Exporter: The Strategic Contours of China’s Arms Transfers.” *Law and the Arms Trade*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781509922321.ch-011>.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Kamal, Nazir. “China’s Arms Export Policy and Responses to Multilateral Restraints.” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 14, no. 2 (1992): 112-41. Accessed June 13, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25798146>.

traditionally dominated by Russian arms exports” while simultaneously “counterbalancing the influence of Western powers.”⁹³

When China first became a major exporter of global arms sales in the 1980s, it did so in the ideologically driven era of the Cold War. At the time, Chinese weapons transfers to state and non-state actors intended to advance the communist political ideology.⁹⁴ Currently, China no longer appears to utilize arms transfers to promote its political ideology, preferring to take a “relatively apolitical approach to arms sales in Africa.”⁹⁵ Indra De Soysa and Paul Midford even found that “China relative to the United States transfers greater amounts of arms to democracies rather than autocracies.”⁹⁶

According to Esther Pan, China attempts to use influence gained from arms sales to leverage its partners in Africa to assist the PRC in its strategic objectives, such as gaining allies in the United Nations.⁹⁷ China can use these allies to help achieve its goals, such as “preventing Taiwanese independence and diverting attention from its own human rights record.”⁹⁸

Take the support of China’s policies toward Xinjiang, for instance. In 2019, two coalitions in the United Nations sent opposing letters specifying either support for or condemnation of China’s actions toward minorities in the Xinjiang region. The former letter,

⁹³ Raska, Michael, and Richard A Bitzinger. “China as an Arms Exporter: The Strategic Contours of China’s Arms Transfers.” *Law and the Arms Trade*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781509922321.ch-011>.

⁹⁴ Conteh-Morgan, Earl and Weeks, Patti, “Is China Playing a Contradictory Role in Africa? Security Implications of its Arms Sales and Peacekeeping” (2016). School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies Faculty Publications, 2016. http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/sigs_facpub/19

⁹⁵ Thrall, Lloyd. “Chinese Presence and Behavior in Africa.” In *China’s Expanding African Relations: Implications for U.S. National Security*, 21-74. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2015. Accessed June 7, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt15zc655.10>.

⁹⁶ De Soysa, Indra, and Paul Midford. “Enter The Dragon! An Empirical Analysis of Chinese versus U.S. Arms Transfers to Autocrats and Violators of Human Rights, 1989-2006.” *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2012): 843-56. Accessed May 27, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41804838>.

⁹⁷ Pan, Esther. “Q&A: China, Africa, and Oil.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, January 18, 2006. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/cfr/international/slot2_011806.html.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

which proclaimed support for China, had 36 signatories.⁹⁹ Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola were among these signatories.¹⁰⁰

Sudan and Angola similarly sided with China over its handling of Hong Kong in 2020, including the signing of a new national security law that allows China to limit Hong Kong citizens' political freedoms.¹⁰¹ Angola received a significant 42 million TIV shipment of Chinese weapons in 2020.¹⁰² While Sudan did not receive Chinese arms in 2020, it was the largest importer of the PRC's weapons in sub-Saharan Africa over the previous five years.¹⁰³ Interestingly, Nigeria abstained from both a 2020 follow-up vote regarding Xinjiang and the Hong Kong vote that same year.¹⁰⁴ This occurred despite Nigeria receiving a 57 million TIV arms shipment from China in 2020.¹⁰⁵ However, Nigeria's abstaining from the vote may have been due to a recent downturn in China-Nigeria relations stemming from a divisive commercial loan agreement between the two countries.¹⁰⁶

To assist allies and partners

Sudan has long been a partner of China in Africa and has imported major Chinese weapons since 1968.¹⁰⁷ The two countries first established diplomatic ties in 1959, and their

⁹⁹ Putz, Catherine. "Which Countries Are For or Against China's Xinjiang Policies?" *The Diplomat*, July 22, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/>.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Lawler, Dave, and Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian. "New Hong Kong National Security Law Sets Harsh Penalties for Broadly Defined Political Crimes." *Axios*, June 30, 2020.

¹⁰² "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database." SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 18, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Lawler, Dave, and Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian. "New Hong Kong National Security Law Sets Harsh Penalties for Broadly Defined Political Crimes." *Axios*, June 30, 2020.

¹⁰⁵ "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database." SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 18, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

¹⁰⁶ Deron, Laure. "Did Nigeria Really Cede Its Sovereignty to China in a Loan Agreement?" *The Diplomat*, August 12, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/did-nigeria-really-cede-its-sovereignty-to-china-in-a-loan-agreement/>.

¹⁰⁷ "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database." SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 18, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

relationship developed noticeably throughout the reign of President Nimeiri (1969-1985).¹⁰⁸ China began increasing its arms exports, eventually becoming one of the largest suppliers of weapons to Sudan in 1994.¹⁰⁹ This increase in weapons imports was in part because of Sudan's need for weapons during the Second Sudanese Civil War, as well as hopes for the "improved finances and enhanced international credit derived from its oil potential."¹¹⁰ A report by the US-based NGO Human Rights First found there to be a "clear linkage between Beijing's controlling interest in Sudan's oil industry and its substantial sale of the small arms being used by Khartoum to commit atrocities in Darfur."¹¹¹

Relations between China and Nigeria formally began in 1971. Since then, the two countries have become close allies and trading partners. Nigeria first imported arms from China in 2010 and has grown to become the second-largest receiver of Chinese weapons in sub-Saharan Africa. Recently, many of the weapons imports have been to assist the country in its fight against terrorist groups, such as the Boko Haram. Among the weapons used for this purpose are the CH-3 armored UAV (drone), with China "seeking to be a first-tier exporter of such modern military systems."¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Large, Daniel. "Sudan's Foreign Relations With Asia: China and the Politics of 'Looking East'." Publication – Center for Security Studies | ETH Zurich. Institute for Security Studies, February 2008. <https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/98943>.

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch. "Arms Transfers to the Government of Sudan." Human Rights Watch. Accessed June 18, 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports98/sudan/Sudarm988-05.htm>.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch. "China's Involvement in Sudan: Arms and Oil." Sudan, Oil, and Human Rights: China's Involvement in Sudan: Arms and Oil, November 2003. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/sudan1103/26.htm>.

¹¹¹ Human Rights First. "New Report: China's Oil Interests In Sudan Fueling Darfur Violence." Human Rights First. Accessed June 24, 2021. <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/2008/03/12/new-report-chinas-oil-interests-in-sudan-fueling-darfur-violence>.

¹¹² Singer, Jeffrey Lin and P.W. "It Looks Like An Armed Chinese-Made Drone Crashed In Nigeria." Business Insider. Business Insider, January 29, 2015. <https://www.businessinsider.com/it-looks-like-an-armed-chinese-made-drone-crashed-in-nigeria-2015-1>.

Official relations between Angola and the PRC began in 1983.¹¹³ However, China was involved in the country before it gained its independence from Portugal in 1975. China supplied weapons to the National Liberation Front of Angola (FLNA), a former insurgent group-turned political party.¹¹⁴ For instance, in 1974, the FLNA “received a 450-ton shipment of arms and benefited from the assistance of 112 Chinese instructors.”¹¹⁵ The two countries have remained close economic and political allies since.

To establish security facilities in receiving countries

None of the countries examined in this study have known Chinese military bases or facilities. Djibouti possesses China’s sole military base on the African continent, and the country has imported relatively few arms from China (13 million TIVs cumulatively).¹¹⁶ Additionally, there are no known Chinese intelligence facilities in Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola.

Discussion

The cases indicate that China has both economic and strategic motivations for selling arms to sub-Saharan Africa. This paper could not gather sufficient data on how much China profited financially from its individual arms sales to Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola, because that data is not publicly shared. However, several reasons indicate that economic profit is likely not a primary motive of China with these arms sales. First, China consistently offers generous financing options for its arms sales to poorer developing countries, of which all three cases are.

¹¹³ Hare, Paul. “China in Angola: An Emergency Energy Partnership.” The Jamestown Foundation, 2006. https://web.archive.org/web/20071128071125/http://jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=415&issue_id=3918&article_id=2371629.

¹¹⁴ Campos, Indira, and Alex Vines. “Angola and China: A Pragmatic Partnership.” Angola and China: A Pragmatic Partnership | Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 6, 2008. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/angola-and-china-pragmatic-partnership>.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ “SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.” SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 18, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

Conteh-Morgan and Weeks note that the PRC makes arms “affordable to cash-poor countries through loans with very low interest rates.”¹¹⁷ If profit were a significant motivator of its arms sales, the PRC would presumably not offer such affordability and financing to receiving countries and instead charge rates more comparable to competing countries.

However, the data showed strong evidence of China selling arms to encourage the sharing of non-military goods and services. This correlation mainly applies to the sharing of natural resources. The transfer of arms to gain access to oil, especially, was evident in all three cases. Conteh-Morgan and Weeks again note that China offers arms to “mineral-rich countries willing to grant access to natural resources in a quid pro quo arrangement for supplying weapons.”¹¹⁸

This research was unable to adequately judge what effect arms sales to Sudan, Nigeria, and Angola had on employment opportunities in China. This difficulty stemmed from two reasons. First, Chinese civilian defense companies that produce weapons have other roles, making it impossible to assess the percentage of any employment increases directly attributed to the companies’ weapons exporting capabilities. AVIC alone has ten business segments, including “defense, transport aircraft, aviation engine, helicopters, avionics, general aviation aircraft, aviation research and development, flight test, trade & logistics, asset management.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, AVIC and NORINCO produce and sell weapons to domestic markets in China and other non-African companies. Therefore, drawing a direct correlation between arms sales to sub-Saharan Africa and employment creation is again difficult.

¹¹⁷ Conteh-Morgan, Earl and Weeks, Patti, "Is China Playing a Contradictory Role in Africa? Security Implications of its Arms Sales and Peacekeeping" (2016). School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies Faculty Publications, 2016.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ GlobalSecurity.org. “Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC).” [globalsecurity.org](https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/avic.htm). Accessed July 9, 2021. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/avic.htm>.

Additionally, China's lack of transparency, and the overall secretive aspect of many arms sales, meant that this study could not assess with high confidence any correlation. For example, as of 2020, AVIC appears to have 417,798 employees.¹²⁰ NORINCO appears to have 204,378 employees.¹²¹ However, neither company specifies the proportion of those numbers in the defense industry aspect of their company, let alone the weapons producing segments.

The data indicates that China used its arms sales to these countries to gain influence. China intended to use this influence to leverage these countries to further its political objectives. The two specific UN agreements examined, those regarding China's Xinjiang and Hong Kong policies, appeared to correlate with arms sales that same year.

The data also appeared to corroborate the theory that countries sell arms to assist allies, as all three countries examined were close economic and political partners of the PRC. Researcher Nan Tian argued that the "Blanket" style of China's arms sales, which involves selling various types of weapons to a diverse set of countries, is inconsistent with the notion of targeted arms sales to achieve strategic objectives.¹²² Instead, he claimed that this is more indicative of arms deals made on a supply and demand basis (and therefore economically motivated).¹²³ However, Byman and Cliff's research opposes this argument and instead asserts that China abstains from selling to potential enemies, thereby suggesting the PRC is more motivated by strategic reasons.¹²⁴ All three of the sub-Saharan African countries that receive the most arms from China are clear allies, supporting the latter conclusion.

¹²⁰ Fortune Staff. "Aviation Industry Corp. of China: 2020 Global 500." Fortune, August 10, 2020. <https://fortune.com/company/aviation-industry-corp-of-china/global500/>.

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Tian, Nan. "China's Arms Trade: a Rival for Global Influence?" The Interpreter. The Interpreter, September 17, 2018. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/chinas-arms-trade-rival-global-influence>.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Byman, Daniel and Roger Cliff, China's Arms Sales: Motivations and Implications. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1999. https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1119.html.

There appeared to be no correlation between arms sales and gaining access to military or intelligence facilities in the receiving country. None of the three countries assessed in this research had Chinese military bases.

Conclusion

The literature review highlighted the various potential economic and strategic motivations for countries selling arms. This paper concludes that both economic and strategic considerations motivate China's arms sales in sub-Saharan Africa. Of the three economic considerations examined, there was only a distinct correlation between China's arms sales and the sharing of non-military goods and services (particularly the supply of resources). Acquiring profit did not appear to be a key consideration. The paper was unable to find a direct correlation between China's arms transfers and increases in employment opportunities.

Of the three strategic considerations examined, this paper assesses that there is a correlation between the PRC's arms sales and gaining influence. Similarly, it found a correlation between China's arms sales and assisting allies and partners. There appeared to be no correlation between China's arms sales and establishing military or intelligence facilities in the receiving country.

Issues with data prevent this paper from drawing definitive conclusions about China's arms transfers to sub-Saharan Africa. However, the preponderance of available data indicated that China is likely motivated more by strategic considerations than economic considerations. This conclusion is consistent with the paper's initial hypothesis that the PRC was primarily motivated by strategic reasons rather than economic reasons.

The cases selected were likely not completely representative of all of sub-Saharan Africa. This underrepresentation is predominantly due to a lack of available and necessary data. For instance, when examining each consideration in the cases, there was rarely sufficient data from each of the three countries. Rather, one or two countries would have the necessary information, with the third not having the required amount.

This issue with gathering data was likely for a few reasons, foremost being the relatively clandestine aspect of many arms transfers. The secretive nature of arms sales, particularly from China, means that there is insufficient data to thoroughly examine every consideration in the cases. China's propensity to use misinformation when reporting on its foreign activities exacerbated this issue. Publicly available information, like that used by the SIPRI to make its Arms Transfer Database, could therefore be erroneous. China is known for its "lack of transparency" over the "volume of sales, [the] role of the central government therein, China's export policies, and its enforcement of them."¹²⁵

Additionally, the quantitative data utilized in this research study came predominantly from SIPRI, which, as mentioned before, only includes what it considers to be "major" weapons.¹²⁶ As China is the largest small arms exporter to Africa, the numbers given in this study could be underrepresented.¹²⁷ This could mean available data is an underrepresentation, or inaccurate representation, of the actual number of transfers.

Policy implications and recommendations for areas of future research

¹²⁵ Thrall, Lloyd. "Chinese Presence and Behavior in Africa." In *China's Expanding African Relations: Implications for U.S. National Security*, 21-74. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2015. Accessed June 7, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt15zc655.10>.

¹²⁶ "Sources and Methods." SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Accessed June 7, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/sources-and-methods>.

¹²⁷ Thrall, Lloyd. "Chinese Presence and Behavior in Africa." In *China's Expanding African Relations: Implications for U.S. National Security*, 21-74. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2015. Accessed June 7, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt15zc655.10>.

This research contributed to existing scholarship on China's increasing engagement in Africa by adding to the debate on whether strategic or economic reasons drive the PRC's arms transfers to sub-Saharan African countries. While it could not make definitive conclusions due to issues with data, the data acquired through this paper's methodology indicated that China is likely motivated more by strategic considerations.

By knowing China's primary motivations for its arms sales to sub-Saharan Africa, US policymakers and others can better weigh decisions on how to counter the PRC on the African continent. The transfer of major weapons systems, such as those discussed in this paper, can have significant regional impacts that influence the United States' posture in the area. Therefore, policymakers and others need to understand what drives that activity. For instance, if the US knows that China's arms transfers are driven more by strategic considerations over economic considerations, it may wish to take additional steps to counter. Moreover, there may be benefits to knowing what we do not know. The lack of available information on small arms and light weapons, for example, means that most recent research on China's arms sales does not include a large segment of the arms industry. It is important for consumers of information on China's arms sales to be aware of this gap in available data.

Future research that uses a different methodology may further this debate and advance the available information. For instance, quantitative analysis examining the correlation between Chinese arms sales and one specific consideration could help increase confidence in that relationship. This method could ameliorate the difficulty of assessing correlation from qualitative data alone. Furthermore, research utilizing a different sampling frame, such as max-variation, could further increase the available information on the subject. Additional scholarship

that includes cases where China did not sell weapons too, per the Mills' Joint Method of Agreement and Disagreement, could likewise be beneficial and add rigor to the study.

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Catrina, Christian. Arms Transfers and Dependence. Geneva: UNIDIR, 1988.

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Defense Industry Daily staff. "Nigeria Spends \$251M for Chinese F-7 Fighters After Oil Deals." Defense Industry Daily, September 30, 2005. <https://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/nigeria-spends-251m-for-chinese-f7-fighters-after-oil-deals-01269/#:~:text=Reuters%20reports%20that%20Nigeria's%20government,series%20of%20significant%20oil%20deals>.

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Curriculum Vitae

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